



UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA

**THE CORRELATES OF SELF-CONCEPT,
ASPIRATIONS AND ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT**

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**THE CORRELATES OF SELF-CONCEPT,
ASPIRATIONS AND ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT**

by

CHAN CHAN HOA

**A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of
the requirements for the degree of**

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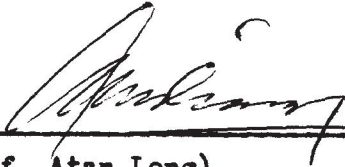
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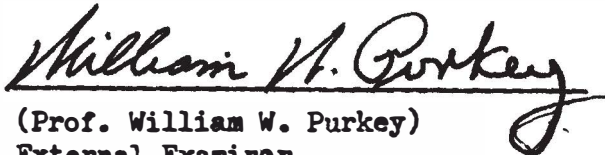
This thesis attached hereto, entitled "The Correlates of Self-concept, Aspirations and Academic Achievement" prepared and submitted by Chan Chan Hoa in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science (Educational Psychology) is hereby accepted.



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ABSTRACT

This study attempted to find out whether there were any significant correlations among student's self-concept, his aspirations and academic achievement. Two measures of self-concept were used, viz., student's self-concept as a learner and teacher's perception of student's self-concept as a learner. Data on these variables were obtained by means of Waetjen's 'Self-concept As A Learner Scale' and Florida Key (A Scale to infer Learner Self-concept) respectively. Variables of aspirations pertaining to the students also included educational aspiration, occupational aspiration, educational expectation, occupational expectation and parental aspiration for the child. Data on these variables were collected by using another set of questionnaire. Academic achievement referred to the students' performance in the Malaysian Certificate of Education Examination. A comparison was also made between the boys and girls as well as the two levels of self-concept in terms of all the variables under study.

The subjects of this study comprised of 400 Form Five students in eight secondary schools in the Kelang District of Selangor. Four of these were boys' schools and the other four were girls' schools. Among the 400 students, 197 were of high

self-concept and 203 were of low self-concept. Students of high self-concept consisted of 93 boys and 104 girls. There were 85 boys and 118 girls of low self-concept.

The data were analysed by means of bi-serial correlation, Pearson's Product-Moment Correlation, and analysis of variance.

It was found that all the variables were positively correlated. The correlations ranged from very low to high (0.018 - 0.638).

Student's self-concept as a learner was found to be significantly correlated with all the variables of aspirations. Its correlations with both educational aspiration ($r=0.306$) and occupational aspiration ($r=0.260$) were found to be lower than that of its correlations with both educational expectation ($r=0.474$) and occupational expectation ($r=0.392$). Among all, it had the lowest correlation with parental aspiration for the child ($r=0.227$). It was moderately and significantly correlated with academic achievement ($r=0.422$).

Teacher's perception of student's self-concept as a learner was significantly correlated with the following variables: educational expectation ($r=0.336$), occupational expectation ($r=0.324$), parental aspiration for the child ($r=0.326$) and

academic achievement ($r=0.295$). However, its correlations with both educational aspiration ($r=0.019$) and occupational aspiration ($r=0.018$) were very low and not significant even at the 5 per cent level.

Academic achievement was rather highly and significantly correlated with educational expectation ($r=0.638$), occupational expectation ($r=0.583$) and parental aspiration for the child ($r=0.593$). It was, however, very lowly correlated with both educational aspiration ($r=0.075$) and occupational aspiration ($r=0.061$). Both these correlations were also not significant even at the 5 per cent level.

The two measures of self-concept, viz., student's self-concept as a learner and teacher's perception of student's self-concept as a learner were significantly correlated ($r=0.400$).

Through the analysis of variance, it was found that there was no significant difference between the boys and girls in terms of the variables under study except for occupational aspiration and academic achievement.

When the students of high and low self-concepts were compared in terms of all the variables under study, it was found that there was significant difference between them in terms of

those variables except for the variable of parental aspiration for the child.

This study shows that among the variables of self-concept, aspirations and academic achievement, student's self-concept as a learner was significantly correlated with aspirations and academic achievement respectively. However, the correlations between aspirations and academic achievement were very low and not significant. This suggests that greater efforts must be made to guide and help students to aspire realistically and objectively so that in the long run their self-concepts would not be adversely affected.

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

In developing countries, education, especially formal education, has been accorded with much importance not just as a means of disseminating knowledge and developing citizenship but also used as a tool for upward social mobility. Hence, not surprisingly, success in public examinations conducted by the government or other recognised authorities is deemed to be a passport to future betterment and advancement.

In Malaysia, for example, parents and teachers alike are very much concerned about the students' performance in the various public examinations which are being held at different levels and at different periods of the year. That these examinations attract so much interest and attention is nothing unusual because success or failure in these examinations may well prove to be the vital determinant of the course a student will have to take. This is because in our system of education, a student who fails to obtain a certain level of achievement as specified in the rules and regulations regarding the award of grades, will fail to obtain promotion to higher level of studies. For example, a form five student who does not achieve a certain level of success as required in the Peperiksaan Sijil Pelajaran

Malaysia (Malaysian Certificate of Education Examination) is not allowed to be promoted into the sixth form in a government aided or sponsored school. This, as a result, may entail a lot of difficulties in his educational pursuit firstly because there are few private institutions catering for higher studies; secondly these institutions charge higher fees; and thirdly, in general they do not provide facilities which are as good, and staff who are as well qualified, as those found in the government schools. Hence, the unsuccessful student may just have to drop out of his educational pursuit and join the queue of employment seekers. Furthermore, poorer and lesser academic qualifications often act as obstacles which impede an individual's career advancement. Although this does not mean that a person of lesser academic achievement is doomed in his career pursuit, it does, however, signify that his road to success has been made more difficult. As such, it is true to say that academic achievement does boost a person's morale and enhance as well as facilitate his occupational endeavours.

In view of the above, many studies have been conducted to assess the possible factors which affect student's academic achievement. It has been proven by many researchers that there are many and varied factors which are contributory towards a

student's success or failure in the examinations. Among the various factors which are most commonly cited are intelligence, self-concept, socio-economic background, school milieu, parental involvement, teacher's prophecy and so on. However, in Malaysia, apparently very few research has been done to ascertain the relationship of self-concept and achievement. Indeed, there is a dearth of research on self-concept and its relationships with aspirations and academic achievement.

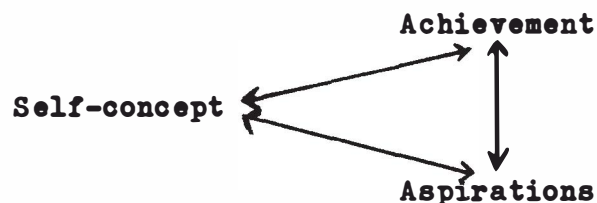
Statement of Problem

Education, both formal and informal, is ubiquitous. Formal education in institutions of learning especially aims at helping a child to develop his potentials to the optimum level. However, for one reason or another, not all children are able to benefit equally from their educational experience. Evidence is abundant that though two individuals may undergo similar educational experience and guidance, with equal opportunities in their pursuit for academic and occupational success, very often they differ in their achievements. In fact, even individuals with the same intellectual ability are often found with differing academic attainment. These discrepancies are the effects and results asserted by varying factors. Although different degrees of emphasis may be placed

on these factors, it is believed that over and above, self-concept plays an important role in a person's success or failure because 'it governs a large part of a person's behaviour, and is also directly related to his general personality and state of mental health' (Chn'g, 1976).

Self-concept is, most simply, the way in which an individual views himself (Sensenig, 1977). Though many factors may have been found to contribute towards a student's success or failure in the examinations, invariably all these must hinge upon the very vital factor of self-concept. This results from the fact that how he views himself, namely his self-concept, will affect his perception of the external world. Such perception will in turn affect his aspirations. In order to get what he aspires for, he needs to acquire achievement which leads to the fulfilment of his aspirations. In aspiring for some goals, the individual attempts to enhance, or at least to maintain, his self-concept. Hence, it is posited that self-concept, aspirations and achievement are closely interrelated.

It is thus believed that the relationships of self-concept, aspirations and achievement can be best illustrated by the following model:



Many researchers have discovered and confirmed that a person with high self-concept will tend to have more confidence in himself when dealing with men and environment. As such, if a person thinks well of himself, looks upon himself with pride, he will want to keep up his ideas of himself. By so doing, he will endeavour to strive and do well in his undertakings.

Many factors are responsible for the formation of self-concept. Of vital importance among these are 'the significant others' such as parents, siblings, teachers and peers. All of them play important roles, directly or indirectly, consciously or unconsciously, in the formation of an individual's self-concept. Parents and teachers exert enormous influence in the formation of a child's self-concept. Punishment, disparagement and ridicule by parents and teachers often make a child feel and think that he is inadequate, worthless and not liked. When he is often confronted with obstacles and tasks which are too difficult for him to surmount or accomplish, he tends to loose

faith in his ability. He builds up a low self-concept as a result of constant disappointment and frustration. The sense of guilt and failure will lower his morale and sense of worth. This barrage of demoralisation will erode his self-concept, and subsequently his achievement. On the other hand, success, praise and reward will further boost his self-concept, and further enhance his confidence and achievement. In short, the actions, both verbal and physical, of parents and teachers towards students are of great psychological meanings to them. The effects are multifarious and of far-reaching consequences in the formation of a student's self-concept.

Psychologists of various theoretical positions accept the fact that children's self-concepts may have a measurable effect on their school performance (Nash, 1976). In other words, self-concept plays a vital role as a determinant of achievement.

Our experience in schools show us that every student has some kind of aspirations. It is believed that 'it is during the school years that individual makes the decisions and formulates the aspirations that propel him towards an ultimate occupational choice' (Simmons and Rosenberg, 1971). It is, however, by no means uncommon to see students who aspire for

high status jobs eventually turn out to be unsuccessful in their educational and occupational pursuits. This is especially true for those who aspire for professional occupations because academic achievement is essentially an important pre-requisite for the pursuance of a professional course. Those, must be the results of unrealistic aspirations. On the other hand, it is also nothing unusual to hear of students of mediocre aspirations achieving high academic success. While it is inconceivable to deny the roles played by factors like intelligence, parental involvement and influence, socio-economic status and so on, it is equally unimaginable to relegate self-concept to a secondary role in the formulations of educational and occupational aspirations of an individual. This is because an individual has 'a perception of not only what he is, and what he has been, but also of what he plans to do, of what his goals and projects are, and what he would like to be' (Hargreaves, 1972).

It is presumed that by the time a student reaches the Form Five level, he has by then formed his self-concept as a learner. Whatever he aspires to achieve or to become, will be based on the way he perceives himself, in particular his academic ability. Basing on such aspirations, he is expected to expend commensurate effort to achieve academically simply because his academic success plays an important role in bringing him

nearer towards the fulfilment of his aspirations. Hence, academic achievement will further enhance his self-concept and spurt him towards further heights of achievement and the ultimate realisation of his goals. Therefore, it is surmised that the three variables are closely interrelated.

CHAPTER TWO

Review of Literature

Self-concept

Interest in self-concept is not a modern phenomenon. Man had wondered about himself since time immemorial. Throughout the centuries this interest had never really waned. Efforts dispensed ranged from pure theoretical formulations to scientific experimentations. Hence, it can be said that self-concept has long captivated the attention of philosophers, sociologists and psychologists. Since the beginning of this century there is a proliferation of research dealing with self-concept.

A major milestone in this search for understanding of self-concept was found in Freud's work. Nevertheless, he had never really approached the subject on self-concept directly. He first paid attention to self under the concept of ego development and functioning. He structured the total personality under three major systems which represent our biological, cognitive and social needs, namely, the id (the instinctual drives), the ego (that inner part of the person which brings it into conformity with the external reality) and the superego (the internalisation of societal and cultural values which order the mind's energies along social paths). As such, to him

the self-concept (which he referred to as 'ego') arises as a result of the intricate interplay between the biological urges of the individual and the ever present modifying influence of culture. The ego determines the mode of expression and facilitates reaction (Freud, 1963).

It was his daughter Anna who was among the first to emphasise the importance of self-image to the individual. However, Anna, like her father, hesitated to make the self a primary psychological unit or give it central importance in her theoretical postulation (Purkey, 1970).

Adler referred to the self area of an individual as 'life style'. This refers to the characteristic manner of coping with life's problems that is moulded by the individual's evaluation of himself and of society. A basic impulse towards self-development and self-realisation is hypothesised. In other words, the subjective interpretation of an individual's experience rather than the actual situations eventually forms the guidance for all his psychological movements (Dinkmeyer, 1965).

Emphasis on the importance of social interaction in shaping self-concept was given by Cooley (1909). He speculated

that the individual's estimate of himself was a function of the ways others thought of him. He termed the self-concept as the 'looking glass self'. It means that we use others as a kind of 'looking glass' just like the way we look at ourselves in the mirror. By so doing, we perceive in another person's mind some thoughts of ourselves, or in other words we imagine what they think of us and are invariably affected by it. Hence, to Cooley, self is a social product.

G.H. Mead (1934) also made self-concept as a major part of his theoretical writings. It is his contention that self-concept is not based on the biological variables alone. It is determined by social-psychological factors. He shared Cooley's view in that the self is a social structure which arises through communication. It results from the individual's interaction with others and his self-esteem is derived from the reflected appraisal of the 'generalised others'. In other words, it is obtained by 'taking the role of the others'. However, Mead recognised that self-concept formation is a life long process though the crucial periods are infancy and childhood.

While Mead stressed about the 'generalised others', Sullivan (1953), who also stressed about the impact of social

interrelationships on the development of the self, postulated that not all people are equally important in influencing the formation of an individual's self-concept. Only people who are close or significant to us will have an enormous influence on us. Consciously or unconsciously, we place great emphasis on their opinions about us. These people are termed the 'significant others'. They may be anybody. However, generally for children the 'significant others' include people like their parents, siblings, peers and teachers.

Combs and Snygg (1959) made a major contribution towards the study of self-concept by introducing the idea about the 'phenomenal self'. They defined the phenomenal or perceived self as those aspects of the perceptual field to which the individual refers to as 'I' and 'me'. This means that the self-concept is the fundamental aspects of the perceived self and it includes those perceptions which are of significance to the individual. The basic drive of the individual is the maintenance and enhancement of the self. This postulation is closely related with the concept of 'life space' suggested by Lewin (1935). To Lewin, the self is the central and relatively permanent organisation which gives consistency to enhance personality. Since man's basic need is for adequacy, his desire is to enhance himself within the phenomenal field leading to